University of Minnesota
http://twin-cities.umn.edu/

Report: Restaurant chains still failing on antibiotics in beef

Chris Dall | News Reporter | CIDRAP News, July 14, 2021
Topics: Antimicrobial Stewardship

SHARE

dusanpetkovic / iStock

The latest evaluation of how the nation's major restaurant chains are faring when it comes to responsible use of antibiotics in beef shows most continue to get a failing grade.

The sixth annual **Chain Reaction Scorecard**, which grades the top 20 US fast food and casual sit-down restaurants on their antibiotic use policies for beef sourcing, and how those policies are implemented and monitored, gave 12 chains "F" grades for taking no public action to reduce routine antibiotic use in their beef supplies. Three companies earned "D" grades, while three chains earned "C" grades.

Among the chains receiving a "C" was Wendy's, which earned a higher grade in this report for its commitment to ending the use of medically important antibiotics in its beef by 2030.

The report, produced by a coalition working to eliminate the routine use of antibiotics in animal agriculture, determines the grades by directly surveying the companies and reviewing their public statements. Earlier Chain Reaction reports focused on chain restaurants' commitments to serving chicken raised without medically important antibiotics, but this report focused specifically on the beef industry.

"The beef industry continues to vastly overuse antibiotics," said report contributor Matt Wellington, public health campaigns director for US PIRG (Public Interest Research Groups) Education Fund. "Beef producers still account for about 41% of medically important antibiotics sold in the meat sector, so that's really where we want to create some change."

Wendy's policy a 'significant step forward'

Restaurant chains can earn higher grades by committing to sourcing beef from producers who've phased out routine use of medically important antibiotics in cattle, a policy that adheres to the position World Health Organization (WHO), which in 2017 recommended that medically important antibiotics should only be used to treat sick animals or control a verified disease outbreak. The WHO, along with many infectious disease and public health experts, contends that use of medically important antibiotics to prevent disease in livestock is inappropriate and contributes to the spread of antibiotic resistance.

The companies are also graded on the progress they've made in implementing their policies, how they communicate progress to customers, and whether they track and monitor antibiotic use in their beef supply chains.

Although most companies did not make any progress from the last report, released in 2019, Wellington said the commitment by Wendy's to end routine use of medically important antibiotics in its US and Canadian beef supply chains by 2030 is a "significant step forward."

"What we need to have happen is have more and more major meat buyers, like Wendy's, setting these timebound commitments," he said. "That's a signal to the beef producers that it's time to change."

Wendy's also committed to tracking and reporting on antibiotic use in its beef supply chain by 2024.

Wellington noted that the poultry industry's move away from routine antibiotic use in the past few years has been driven in part by the purchasing power of large restaurant chains, many of which have instituting policies that call for chicken raised without routine antibiotics.

"If the same happens for beef...that should push the beef industry toward stopping the overuse of antibiotics," he said.

Also earning a "C" grade were McDonald's, which failed to meet **its commitment** to monitor and set antibiotic reduction targets in its beef supply by 2020, and Subway, which promised in 2015 to start serving beef raised without routine use of antibiotics but has not taken any steps to begin the transition. The report expresses concern that both companies seem to be weakening their prior positions on responsible antibiotic use in beef.

As in the previous years, Chipotle and Panera received an "A" and an "A-" for their longstanding practice of serving beef raised without routine use of antibiotics. In addition, Chipotle is the only company that requires suppliers to track antibiotic use and makes the information public.

IHOP and Applebee's went from an "F" to a "D" for serving some beef raised under a responsible antibiotic use policy.

Calls for national targets

The report doesn't just single out the restaurant industry. It also notes that none of the nation's four largest beef processors—Cargill, JBS, Tyson, and National Beef—prohibit routine antibiotic use in cattle as part of their standard operating procedures.

Get CIDRAP updates

Wellington said that the problem is that antibiotic use is "part of the fabric" of conventional beef production in the United States. Cattle producers rely on antibiotics to prevent diseases that occur when calves are shipped to feedlots and during the time they are raised on the feedlots.

"It's not as simple as taking antibiotics out of the mix," he said. "You have to change the way that you raise the animals in order to reduce the risk of disease naturally."

The report calls on restaurant chains to make firm, timebound commitments to phase out routine use of antibiotics across all meat supply chains, to collect more data on how antibiotics are being used by suppliers and share that data with the public, and use third-party certifiers to verify progress. It also urges meat producers to implement changes that will eliminate the need for routine antibiotic use.

The groups behind in the Chain Reaction Scorecard would also like to see more involvement from the federal government. The Food and Drug Administration banned the use of medically important antibiotics for growth promotion in food-producing animal in 2017, but still allows them to be used for disease prevention.

"The global health threat from antibiotic resistance demands bold government leadership and the U.S. must work harder to curb the enormous overuse of medically important antibiotics in the livestock sector," Lena Brook, director of food campaigns at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), said in a **press release**. "Most urgently, the US should set national targets to reduce the overall use of these antibiotics, especially in beef and pork production, and develop a robust system to track antibiotic use and bacterial resistance at the farm level."

An **analysis** published last summer by NRDC and the Centers for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy estimated that roughly 65% of medically important antibiotics currently sold in the United States are for food-animal production, and that cattle and swine production together consume about 44% more antibiotics than human medicine.

Choose newsletters

- Select all
- Daily Headlines
- Antimicrobial Stewardship Newsletter
- Chronic Wasting Disease Newsletter
- Flu Vaccine Roadmap Newsletter
- Resilient Drug Supply Newsletter

Email address

SUBSCRIBE

RELATED NEWS

ECDC issues cautious guidance on use of doxyPEP for sexually transmitted infections
January 20, 2026
Chris Dall

Novel XDR Shigella strain identified in Los Angeles
January 14, 2026
Chris Dall

Stewardship intervention fails to reduce antibiotic overuse at discharge, trial finds
January 12, 2026
Chris Dall

Study supports de-escalation of broad-spectrum antibiotics in certain sepsis patients
December 23, 2025
Chris Dall

THIS WEEK'S TOP READS

1 **Controversial CDC hep B vaccine study in Guinea-Bissau may be canceled**

African officials say a controversial study of the hepatitis B vaccine—scheduled to begin this month—may be canceled, but US officials differ.

Liz Szabo | January 15, 2026

2 **45 confirmed sick in multistate Salmonella outbreak tied to supplement**

No deaths have been reported, but 12 people have been hospitalized.

Stephanie Soucheray | January 15, 2026

3 **CIDRAP Op-Ed: Vaccine myths that won't die and how to counter them—part 1**

Today's myths: "Vaccines were never properly tested," "Vaccinated and unvaccinated kids haven't been compared," "The ingredients are toxic," and "Too many, too soon." More in part 2 tomorrow.

Jake Scott, MD | January 15, 2026

4 **Novel XDR Shigella strain identified in Los Angeles**

Researchers say the strain of XDR *Shigella sonnei* appears to be spreading beyond high-risk groups into the broader population, which could lead to more treatment failure.

Chris Dall | January 14, 2026

5 **Family history of cancer linked to increased risk of long COVID**

Pre-existing conditions, genetic susceptibility, immune dysregulation, or environmental exposures may play a role.

Laine Bergeson | January 15, 2026

6 **Shingles vaccine may slow biological aging in older adults**

The vaccine was associated with less inflammation, slower epigenetic changes, and increased immunity.

Laine Bergeson | January 20, 2026

7 **Measles cases soar in South Carolina, top 400**

Also, Utah has 25 new cases, raising the state total to 201.

Stephanie Soucheray | January 14, 2026

8 **CIDRAP Op-ed: Vaccine myths that won't die and how to counter them—part 2**

Today's myths include "Vaccines cause autism," "VAERS proves vaccines kill people," "Natural immunity is better," and "mRNA vaccines cause turbo cancers."

Jake Scott, MD | January 16, 2026

9 **Minnesota residents delay medical care for fear of encountering ICE**

ICE raids are leading a growing number of people across the state to cancel important and even life-saving medical appointments.

Liz Szabo | January 16, 2026

10 **US flu activity declining but remains high**

The number of US jurisdictions reporting very high or high flu activity fell from the previous week, from 45 to 36.

Chris Dall | January 16, 2026

Choose newsletters

- Select all
- Daily Headlines
- Antimicrobial Stewardship Newsletter
- Chronic Wasting Disease Newsletter
- Flu Vaccine Roadmap Newsletter
- Resilient Drug Supply Newsletter

OUR UNDERWRITERS

GRANT SUPPORT FOR ASP PROVIDED BY

wellcome · BIOMÉRIEUX · BD

UNRESTRICTED FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY

BENTSON FOUNDATION

Principal Underwriter

UP — *Leading Underwriter*

3M — *Major Underwriter*

GILEAD — *Supporting Underwriter*

AVR ALBERT VICTOR RAVENHOLT FUND — *Supporting Underwriter*

BECOME AN UNDERWRITER

Help make CIDRAP's vital work possible

SUPPORT US

Contact Us

CIDRAP - Center for Infectious Disease Research & Policy
Research and Innovation Office, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

EMAIL US

© 2026 Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights Reserved.
The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer

Research and Innovation Office | Contact U of M | Privacy Policy